

# Johan Bojer Stages a Comedie Humaine Among Norway's Fjords

## A Work of Tragic Genius

Deep Pathos and Subtle Insight in Norwegian Writer's Novel, Life

THE peculiar qualities of Johan Bojer's genius are already known to American readers through the translations of "The Great Hunger," "The Face of the World and Treacherous Ground," "Life Mosaic," "Yard," and others. The author's other novels chiefly in the fact that it is painted on a somewhat larger canvas. Without losing any of his capacity for intense psychological analysis, he distributes it more evenly among the various characters of the story. Life is not dominated by any single individual, as "The Great Hunger" is dominated by Peer Holm and as "Treacherous Ground" is dominated by Eric Eyde.

### Portrays Scope of Life

On the contrary, what Bojer gives us is a miniature Comedie Humaine. He takes a cross-section of Norwegian life and examines it carefully, faithfully, minutely. True, the strange, uttermost romance of Reidar Bang and Astrid Riis holds the center of the stage, but there is ample room for the other characters as well. And one of the minor episodes in the novel are stories in themselves. The picture of broken-down old Captain Riis, groping about after his futile schemes of revenge, suggests Ibsen's John Gabriel Bergman. And there is, here, haunting pathos in the experience of the middle-aged school teacher, Holm, who recovers his youth in a single moment of mad, glorious, forbidden romance, which is irrevocably matched from him as soon as he has enjoyed it.

Bojer is a profound pessimist and realist; but his realism is not that of Zola and his school. Despite the gray address which permeates his work, the Norwegian author is not an utter materialist; he seems to retain some faith in the existence of ultimate spiritual values. He is ironic without cynicism; he is somber, but never brutal.

Bojer has the soul of a Puritan, satisfied only with the highest peaks of spiritual achievement. It is the suffering complexity of human existence that drives him to pessimism and despair. He cannot endure the perpetual compromises of life, the frequent choice between the bad and the less bad, the constant intrusion of petty and unworthy cares and motives. He often confronts his characters with the alternative of narrow, joyless duty and of selfish, carefree pleasure. And, whichever horn of the dilemma they may choose, he is never satisfied with the result. The Puritan within him

speaks for duty; the artist for joy. Between these clashing impulses he is never able to evolve an adequate solution.

Bojer's austere psychological drama is played against a physical background of remarkable beauty. He often seems to seek relief from the harassing soul questionings of his characters in almost lyrical descriptions of Norwegian scenery, wild fjords and mountains, vast fields of white snow, gorgeous red sunsets. Here is a typical passage, describing the thrill and exhilaration of a skiing party:

### A Skiing Party

"Many miles off, the white horizon rose and fell, assuming fantastical shapes of men and animals. To the north stood two old wives, with their heads up in the sky, gossiping on just the same subjects as they had discussed from time immemorial. A fissure in a mountain was a valley containing many villages, and beyond were more mountains and more fissures. It was Norway. Holm could have described it all in the school-room, and yet it now seemed as if he had never seen it before. In town the sky was only a theory, but here it was an actual fact. It glowed in the south, it flickered in the west. The sky glided of themselves; the feet moved, but only to yield, not to work. It was like a voluptuous dance across a floor bounded by infinity itself, beneath a dome whose height none had measured. The mind is filled with rhythm, and one looks about smiling."

In a sober and restrained sense, Bojer's novel is an indictment of life. It gravely measures the inevitable, vast gulf between human aspiration and human capacity. It is full of tortured, twisted, bleeding souls, broken on the rack of relentless destiny. With a stern insight, which he shares with Aeschylus and with Thomas Hardy, Bojer shows what portentous rôle fate and chance play in our lives, how little scope is left for the human will. The work is not unworthy of its daring title; it is a very faithful reproduction of the essential factors in human existence, conceived in reverence and executed in beauty. Taken in connection with his other novels, Life marks Bojer as perhaps the most significant figure in Norwegian literature since Ibsen.

## Books Received

### Fiction

ROSE OF THE SEA. By Countess Maryska. Published by Houghton-Mifflin Company, New York and Boston.

The romance of a founding girl and a wealthy young baronet.

THE WASTED ISLAND. By Elmar O'Duffy. Published by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York.

A story of Irish life which reaches its climax in the rebellion of Easter, 1916.

THE MAN FROM ASHALUNA. By Henry Bayard Brown. Published by Small, Maynard & Co., New York.

"Big Business" adds a touch of excitement to this tale of placid Ashaluna.

THE PEOPLE OF THE RUINS. By Edward Shanks. Published by Frederick A. Stokes, New York.

A vision of the world as it might be in 2074 if it were subjected to the horrors of Bolshevism during the intervening years.

SIDE ISSUES. By Jeffrey F. Jeffrey. Published by Thomas Seltzer, New York.

A group of English war stories.

### Religion

THE POWER OF PRAYER. Edited by W. B. Patterson. D. D. Published by The Macmillan Company, New York.

A selection and criticism of the best essays submitted in competition for a prize offered the best paper on this subject.

A MOREL SEEKER AFTER GOD. By Samuel M. Zwarg. Published by Fleming H. Revell Company, New York.

The life and work of a medieval Persian mystic.

CHINESE HEART THROBS. By Jennie V. Hughes. Published by Fleming H. Revell Company, New York.

Sketches and stories by a woman who has been a missionary in China for many years.

THE SYSTEM OF ANIMATE NATURE. By J. Arthur Thomson. Published by Henry Holt & Co., New York.

The second volume of a work by a well known writer on natural history. It combats the tendency toward determinism and irreligion.

EACH MAN HIS OWN PRIEST. By A. J. Bowen. Published by the Revell Press, New York.

A work which emphasizes the significance of Jesus Christ in the religious life of every individual.

### Business

OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE SEVENTH NATIONAL FOREIGN TRADE CONVENTION. Edited by the Secretary, Industries House, New York.

The complete stenographic report of the proceedings of this convention, which was held in San Francisco last May.

THE LITERATURE OF BUSINESS. Selected and edited by A. A. Gould. Publishers and Herbert Leisner, New York.

Extracts from many sources, all bearing some relation to various aspects of modern business.

THE ELEMENTS OF MARKETING. By Paul T. Cherington. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.

A concise study of the concrete problems of merchandise distribution.

THE BUSINESS MAN'S ENGLISH. By Wallace Edgar Bartholomew and Floyd Hurbutt. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.

A summary of the rules of correct English, especially adapted to the use of the business man.

### War

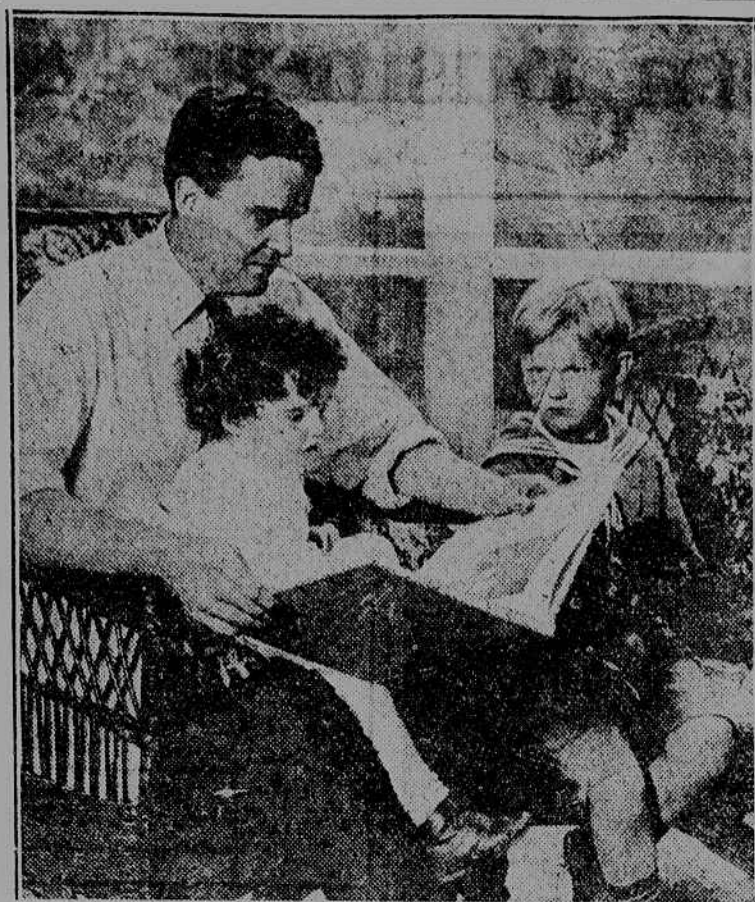
THE AMERICAN RED CROSS IN THE GREAT WAR. By Henry P. Davison. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.

A new edition of this authoritative account of the work of the Red Cross in the war.

### Miscellaneous

SOCIAL SCANDINAVIA IN THE VIKING AGE. By Mary Williams Williams. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.

How the rough Norse adventurers of the Middle Ages lived, dressed, worked and fought. The author is a



IT'S A good old word, asserts Bruce Barton, in the book of that title, published by The Century Company. This picture gives every indication that Mr. Barton has reason to feel optimistic as regards things in general

## The French Accept "Gentleman"

Academy Has Admitted the Word to the Official Dictionary

By Arthur S. Draper

LONDON, October 8.

WITH almost the same pleasure a boy shows when he gets his first air rifle, the British have received the word "gentleman" to the official dictionary of France. It was hailed as a "graceful compliment," "a tribute to our comradeship in arms" and various other expressions of satisfaction. After nearly forty years the Academy is working among the "G's" in this dictionary, which is the last word in what is available for literary use.

The French have the word "gentilhomme," ordinarily defined as a nobleman, but henceforth to be used in describing "a man who, without being noble by race, has lofty sentiments, elegant manners and does noble acts." The Academy definition of "gentleman" is "an English word, sometimes employed in French in the metaphorical and moral sense of the word gentilhomme."

Perhaps no small part of the British satisfaction with the Academy's decision is due to the feeling that in this age of Bolshevism a group of gentlemen in a foreign land have come to the rescue of a word which suffered much during the war. It is as if the New York Stock Exchange sent a resolution supporting the British system of coinage. To be known as a gentleman in 1914 meant something in England, but that was in the days before the world was made safe for democracy. All kinds of things happened in the war. Privates became colonels. Butchers became millionaires. Publishers became peers and peers felt they were becoming paupers.

No military critic ever wrote about Britain's gentleman-power. Asquith pledged "the last man and the last shilling." Lloyd George called "every man to the colors." War literature had few references about gentlemen; it was either the men of the first, or the "die-hards," or the "devils," always in the affectionate tones of the Virginian. The war brought many changes and there was much lamenting the departure of not a few of the old established customs and precedents. For a long time it seemed as if the word gentleman had gone forever. Gentleman meant what it does in America no more. Now it will mean something more. There is the famous cricket match at Lord's between the Gentlemen and the Players—amateurs and professionals. Officers in the army are "gentlemen." "Pro" golfers are not "gentlemen."

Says The Times "It will be a curious result if the choice between 'gentilhomme' and 'gentleman' allows either word to recover the connotation of birth which is disappearing from both. Notwithstanding the definition of the Academy, it would be more in accordance with the history of language were the foreign introduction to acquire the full meaning which the native word has lost. There is an actual parallel in English. The foreign word 'salub' is creeping into use with the

sociate professor of history in Goucher College.

THE POSITION OF THE LABORER IN A SYSTEM OF NATIONALISM. By Edgar S. Furness. Published by Houghton-Mifflin Company, Boston and New York.

Problems and conditions of labor in England from 1680 to 1775. The work is one of the Hart, Schaffner & Marx prize essays in economics.

MANUAL OF TROPICAL AND SUB-TROPICAL FRUITS. By Wilson Popo. Published by the Macmillan Company, New York.

A detailed discussion of many valuable but little known fruit products of the warmer zones.

LETTERS TO A YOUNG MAN ON LOVE AND HEALTH. By Walter M. Gail. Published by Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York.

Advice and instruction for young men in the problems of sex.

RACHEL COMFORTED. By Mrs. Fred Maturin. Published by Dodd, Mead & Co., New York.

A mother's account of her psychic intercourse with her dead son, with prophetic remarks by the late W. T. Stead and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

### Notes of Books

#### And of Authors

MISS LULU BETT, the novel by Zona Gale, published by D. Appleton & Co., which has been hailed as the outstanding novel of the year, will soon be seen on the stage in dramatic form. Brock Pemberton is the producer and he intends to put the play into rehearsal as soon as the dramatic version of the book is completed. This means that Miss Lulu Bett and her companion characters, who are known to thousands of readers, will be seen in New York before the holidays.

### An Author Who Knows the West

Robert Welles Ritchie, author of Trails to Two Moons, one of the Little, Brown & Co.'s new Western stories, is a former New York Sun man who now resides in California. At one time he lived in Wyoming, where he witnessed the pursuit of cattle thieves so picturesquely described in his novel.

### Alias Craig Kennedy

Arthur B. Reeve, author of The Soul Scar and other novels in which the scientific detective Craig Kennedy plays the major rôle, has had concrete proof that this brain child of his has achieved human proportions. The other day Mr. Reeve received a letter forwarded to him by the Harpers, addressed "Craig Kennedy, Franklin Square, New York."

## The Black Knight

High-Spirited Story of Adventure

THE BLACK KNIGHT (Henry Holt) has its preface at the back of the book, and there it tells something about Mr. Crosbie Garstin and Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick, the authors of the book. Mr. Garstin, author of stirring adventure stories, into which he had never permitted a heroine to enter, was asked by Mrs. Sidgwick to introduce a heroine into his next story and she offered to furnish the heroine. The responsibility for the present story is thus neatly divided between the collaborators, and both have acquitted themselves excellently.

The Black Knight is a thoroughly diverting and high-spirited yarn, which ranges over Canada, England and the Continent. Michael Winters, the indolently bred son of a very rich English promoter, finds himself one morning the heir of some very bad debts bequeathed to him by his father, who had run his company on the rocks and committed suicide. In Canada, after many exhilarating vicissitudes, he recoups the family fortune and returns to the Continent. There, under extraordinary circumstances, in a French gambling salon, he meets the heroine. She is a high-spirited, adventurous creature—an English girl, who, wearying of the narrow life of her English village, sets out to seek her fortune with her French relatives and falls upon strange adventures.

In The Black Knight it is the unexpected that always occurs, and this often in the most vigorous manner. The mode of the story, too, is extremely diversified. Certainly Mr. Garstin and Mrs. Sidgwick have not failed to furnish fresh and startling adventures, nor have they failed to make their hero and heroine people of real and engaging charm.

Although Franklin Square is a place of many byways, the letter was delivered to Harper & Bros., Mr. Reeve's publishers. It contained a check for a set of the Craig Kennedy stories. In The Soul Scar, Mr. Reeve's latest published novel, Craig Kennedy solves a romantic mystery through the psychoanalysis of a beautiful woman's dreams.

### Popular Chemistry

In order to popularize the fascinating facts of chemistry and to show how much we human beings owe to the science, the Chemical Foundation, Inc., a semi-official corporation, has ordered from the publishers (The Century Company) a large special edition of Edwin E. Slosson's Creative Chemistry for distribution to selected lists of people.

### Rupert Hughes Home From the West

Rupert Hughes, author of What's the World Coming To? published by the Harpers, has at last completed his intermittent return journey from California, and is now at his home at Bedford Hills. Mr. Hughes is working on proofs of his new book, which the Harpers will bring out next month. It is a collection of short stories, many of which appeared in popular magazines throughout the country, and bears the interesting title, Momma and Other Unimportant People.

### How To Write Editorials

D. Appleton & Co. are publishing a book by L. N. Flint, professor of journalism in the University of Kansas, entitled The Editorial. In this volume the subject of the editorial is considered from all viewpoints, the historical, the critical and creative, the functional and the typographical. Practical helpfulness is the keynote of the entire treatment and the book is one which fills an important place in the practical literature on journalism.

### New Edition of Work on Anthropology

The Putnam have lately published a new edition of a famous old book, Tylor's Primitive Culture, which first appeared in 1871. This book gave the author, then a professor at Oxford University, the foremost place among anthropologists of his time.

### New Editions of Old Books

Maurice Leloir's gift for picturing the eighteenth century with exquisite gaiety and grace is the wholly justifiable reason Brentano's seems to have for issuing new editions of Manon Lescaut and Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey.

## The New York Times says:

"It is a long time since Mr. Maxwell has given us so absorbingly interesting a novel as this new one. Its characters are real flesh-and-blood men and women. The book is not milk for babes, but of willful nastiness there is none."

## For Better, For Worse

By W. B. Maxwell

Author of "The Devil's Garden," etc.

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Publishers for Eighty Years

## The Vacation of the Kelwyns

Posthumous Novel by William Dean Howells  
Pictures a Bygone Day

IT IS too late in the day, or perhaps it is too soon after his death, to make any modifications of the estimate of William Dean Howells. He rose to his eminence with the era of the '70s, in them he lived vividly, and when the '70s vanished he blurred and receded with them. He never really emerged from them—they regard of them, that of such was the more season of his power, and more and more reminiscent he harked back to them. Of course, as he grew vaguer as a literary figure he loomed correspondingly larger in sentimental regard—and thus in a way was compensation roughly made him for the fact that he had been jostled out of popular favor by younger and perhaps cruder men.

How thin and attenuated Howells's literary resources had become, how remote he was from his time, is strikingly demonstrated in his posthumous novel, The Vacation of the Kelwyns (Harpers). And yet it is, too, the more vivid a picture of a bygone era because Howells still partook of its feelings and its way of thinking.

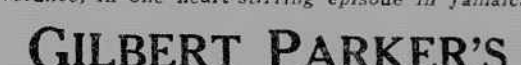
The material of the novel is the adventure indulged in by a professor and his family—an innocuous, prim and timid adventure which only the intense cautiousness of that colorless family makes important. The Kelwyns were fearfully embarking for the summer on the hazardous enterprise of seeking their summer rustic diversion in an unaccustomed place—a crude Shaker colony. Their agitation over

domestic arrangements, their burning anxiety to maintain their accustomed superiority in this unfamiliar place, their careful weighings of proffered friendships—these comprise the emotions of the novel. There is an unmistakable authenticity in these people. One has a conviction, gathered from Mr. Howells's affectionate regard of them, that of such was the intellectual middle class of the time—infinitely assured of its ordained superiority, infinitely jealous of its dignity and infinitely meticulous and shrewd in its judgment of social distinctions—utterly, hopelessly unattractive and depressing "nice" people. "Nice" is Mr. Howells's description of them many times in the course of the book—to be "nice" is the pinnacle of grace.

The romance of the book, the heart interest, is furnished by the tepid, extremely tepid, love affair of Parthenope Brooks, a visitor of the Kelwyns, for the itinerant teacher, an Emersonian sort of young man.

It cannot be said that The Vacation of the Kelwyns engages vividly the imagination or the emotions of the present generation. Yet it has an undeniable interest. Out of the what-nots and antimacassars of the country parlor, out of the "waterfalls" of our grandmothers' wardrobe and out of the novels of William Dean Howells we may reconstruct, if we are so minded, the social history of the middle period.

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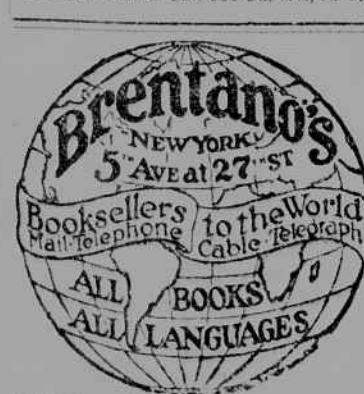
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